



AMERICAS QUARTERLY REPORT

This document provides an overview of key developments affecting the displacement situation in the Americas and some UNHCR response activities in line with the 2020 strategic objectives for the region.

FIGURES IN THE AMERICAS

18% of the global population of concern to UNHCR is in the **Americas**. They include:

4.6 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela displaced throughout Latin America

8 million IDPs living throughout the region

514,700 refugees and asylum-seekers from the north of Central America living outside their home countries

81,000 Nicaraguans seeking asylum in Costa Rica

Since 2019, there has been a **25% increase** in the population of concern in the Americas

LATIN AMERICA

Latin America is among the regions hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic. The region's death toll is among the world's highest, and at least four countries – **Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and Mexico** – have each reported over 1 million cumulative cases. The prolonged lockdowns and resulting economic downturn and have disproportionately impacted refugees and asylum seekers, as well as internally displaced and stateless populations and others of concern to UNHCR in the Americas. Additionally, the economic crisis and social pressures brought on by the pandemic are taking a severe toll on displaced people's ability to integrate within their host countries and communities. As a result, many who were largely self-reliant at the beginning of the year, have now become overwhelmingly reliant on humanitarian assistance.

Many borders throughout the region remain closed as a result of the pandemic. Nevertheless, those pandemic-related closures have not brought displacement in the Americas to a halt. Indeed, enhanced border controls are pushing many to resort to dangerous irregular

channels, which expose users to heightened risks of potential refoulement, extortion, health issues and abuse. Additionally, the fact that irregular routes are in near-constant flux makes rendering assistance to those in need a challenge.

Throughout 2020, **UNHCR adapted to the pandemic in order to help refugees and others of concern meet their urgent basic needs**, despite lockdowns. Changes have included expanding cash assistance programmes and adopting innovative remote attention and counselling mechanisms. In parallel, UNHCR has worked with governments at all levels to advocate for **the inclusion of refugees and migrants both in national social protection schemes and recovery programmes.**

With the coronavirus crisis exacerbating already dire humanitarian needs globally, **supporting multi-stakeholder engagement is key for UNHCR.** Such engagement includes, regional frameworks such as the **Regional Platform for Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants, the Quito Process, the MIRPS** and other relevant regional migration/asylum forums.

VENEZUELA SITUATION



5.4 MILLION
REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS
from Venezuela



4.6 MILLION
of them living in countries throughout
Latin America and the Caribbean



OVER 2.5 MILLION RESIDENCY PERMITS,
AND OTHER STAY VISAS ISSUED
TO VENEZUELAN

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Despite public health mobility restrictions, border closures and even pre-COVID restrictive measures that are still in place in many countries, the **number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants continues to rise**, primarily as a result of irregular border crossings, which of course come with heightened risks.

Though the situation caused by the pandemic made some Venezuelans deciding to return to their country, since August the rate of such returns has slowed and was outpaced by the resumption of outflows from Venezuela to Colombia and other countries in the region. Multiple factors are contributing to the recent uptick in outflows, including a further deterioration of conditions inside Venezuela as well as the ongoing health emergency there. The easing of border restrictions in some countries – which rekindled the prospect of economic opportunities there – has also played a role.

This new situation presents serious humanitarian and protection challenges that are further compounded by the pandemic.

Still, throughout the multidimensional challenge that 2020 has posed across the region, Latin America has underscored its commitment to protecting those in need of international protection. In August, **Brazil** announced that 46,300 Venezuelans had been recognized as refugees as the result of a fast-track procedure that began in December 2019, giving the country the largest number of recognized refugees in Latin America.

In **Peru**, 42,800 asylum claims have been filed since last June, when the government launched a remote filing system.

In **Ecuador**, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility reported that some 75,000 applications for humanitarian visas had been received since the beginning of the regularization process, and another 40,500 had been issued. In total, around 200,000 Venezuelans have acquired legal status in Ecuador via a variety of different types of visas.



803,700 REGISTERED ASYLUM-CLAIMS

496,000 IN PERU

102,500 IN BRAZIL

104,900 IN U.S.A

29,000 IN ECUADOR

17,000 IN COLOMBIA

143,402 RECOGNISED REFUGEES

In **Colombia**, over 14,200 applications for a new type of visa, the Special Stay Permit (PEP VI), were registered in the two weeks following its launch in October. The visa allows for the regularization of Venezuelans who entered Colombia regularly prior to 31 August, 2020. Additionally, the National Registry office continued to implement the Primero la Niñez programme, under which children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents – who had previously been at risk of statelessness – are granted Colombian citizenship and access to full rights. The proceedings continued to be carried out despite pandemic-related restrictions and a temporary suspension in services, and more than 47,000 children were granted citizenship between August 2019 and July 2020.

UNHCR RESPONSE IN 2020

As of November, UNHCR has been stepping up actions for **Emergency Preparedness for the Venezuela Situation**, with the goal of jointly identify gaps, challenges and obstacles, as well as areas in which UNHCR can provide guidance and support and a coordinated response to the spiralling outflows. UNHCR is working in coordination with authorities and interagency partners to reinforce border monitoring, step up CBI programming, increase capacity at reception centres and emergency shelters, and build up assistance stockpiles – particularly in **Colombia** and **Brazil**.

UNHCR is also leading interagency efforts to reactivate the Support Spaces network in order to provide frontline assistance and services which, of course, adhere to COVID-19-related biosecurity measures and recommendations.

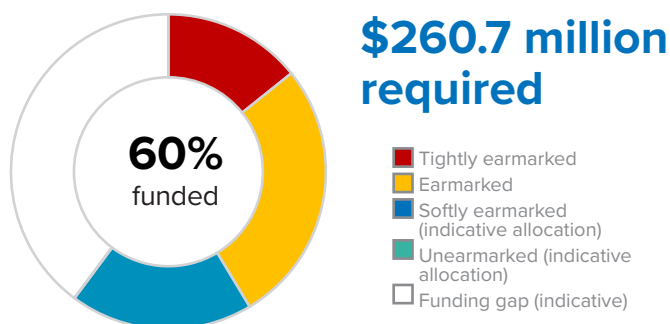
As part of regional efforts to provide lifesaving support to

refugees and migrants from Venezuela – particularly to those caught up in the severe economic downturn caused by the pandemic – UNHCR and its partners provided some 106,000 individuals throughout the region with cash assistance, while another 34,000 people were provided shelter. Additionally, basic household items, such as from kitchen sets, mosquito nets and jerricans, have been distributed to nearly 90,000 people.

Despite the challenges posed by confinement measures and mobility restrictions, UNHCR has strengthened remote communication with refugees and migrants. Over recent months, innovative new solutions have allowed 1.4 million people to voice their needs and concerns and provide feedback.

In November, UNHCR **Ecuador** launched a WhatsApp Information Line that was accessed by over 1,700 users in the first week after its launch. The line has since sent out some 12,120 messages with key information on rights and services available in Ecuador.

UNHCR's financial requirements 2020 for the Venezuela Situation (17 November 2020)



INSIDE VENEZUELA

Inside Venezuela, UNHCR is taking part in the Humanitarian Response Plan, which has identified 7 million people in need and aims to assist 4.5 million women, men, girls and boys. The coronavirus pandemic has compounded pre-existing needs, resulting in the High-Level Humanitarian Donors Roundtable on Venezuela, which was organized last September by Sweden and OCHA. The roundtable mobilized additional international support for the humanitarian response, in light of the impact of the pandemic.

UNHCR's operation on the ground in Venezuela is expanding the scope of its activities, with the provision of Refugee Housing Units, tents, water tanks and pills, hygiene kits and other non-food items to addition regions of the country where the agency had not had a significant presence. These new regions include the central states of Barinas and Mérida, as well as the northern coastal state of Falcon, which has become a launchpad for those decamping the country via maritime routes.

The so-called "Equal Place" initiative in **Trinidad and Tobago** has allowed around 1,000 students to overcome connectivity challenges to access remote education services.

In a bid to foster inclusion and livelihoods opportunities, UNHCR helps provide refugees and migrants in Latin America access to vocational training and employment initiatives, many of them organized in conjunction with authorities or the private sector. In **Peru**, some 1,300 people have participated in workshops aimed at giving them the skills they need in the job market. In **Colombia**, UNHCR launched the second edition of its "Guide to Hiring Venezuelans in Colombia," together with Tent Partnerships for Refugees, the Ministry of Labour and HIAS.

In **Brazil**, over 42,000 refugees and migrants from Venezuela were relocated from the extreme north of the county to states, throughout the rest of the continent-sized nation, where they are better able to integrate and find steady employment. Working with local governments via the **Cities of Solidarity Initiative** has also allowed UNHCR to foster integration opportunities. Meetings in **Argentina** (including representatives of 21 cities) and **Uruguay** (with representatives of nine cities) featured discussion on the challenges and opportunities for the socio-economic integration of refugees and migrants during the health emergency.

Inter Agency Cooperation

Regional cooperation strengthened amidst the pandemic. Last October, the Santiago de Chile Chapter Meeting on Human Mobility and Venezuelan citizens for Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the Quito Process, held the sixth meeting of this inter-governmental fora aimed at strengthening cooperation and regional responses to the situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants throughout Latin America. With the signature of the [Declaration of Santiago](#), 13 member States confirmed their commitment to cooperate on issues such as unaccompanied children and family reunification; validating foreign education credentials; the socioeconomic integration of refugees and migrants; the fight against human trafficking; promoting dialogue among the national asylum commissions; sharing best practices among reception centres; and mapping of support spaces, among other issues. As agreed, Peru will assume the Pro-Tempore Presidency in 2021.

NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA SITUATION

 **833,000** PEOPLE FROM NORTH CENTRAL AMERICA displaced worldwide

 **515,000** ASYLUM CLAIMS by people from NCA between 2014 and mid-2020.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Central America saw a record number of hurricanes in 2020. Tropical Storm Eta caused considerable damage across the region in early November, which was only compounded by another tropical storm, Iota, just over a week later. Even before Iota, Eta affected some 4 million people across Central America. **Honduras**, with almost 3 million people affected by the storm, was the nation hardest hit, followed by **Nicaragua**. Health authorities in the region are warning that the storms have raised the spectre not only of water-borne diseases, but also of the potential for the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 – which has further complicated the emergency response. Tens of thousands of people remain in shelters, where maintaining social distancing and proper hygiene practices is, of course, challenging. Additionally, there have been reports of violence and harassment, as well as criminal gang violence, in storm-hit areas and around shelters.

Compounded by the tropical storms and the pandemic, generalised violence appears to be on the rise once again in the North of Central America. In **El Salvador**, 154 violent deaths were reported only in October – 30 more than in the same period of 2019. In Honduras, the number of reported cases of SGBV increased significantly since March, when coronavirus-related lockdowns were imposed. In **Guatemala**, the departments of Huehuetenango, Chiquimula, and Solola saw a rise in homicides, according to a study by the Centre for National Economic Investigations.

Still, the region also saw recent progress toward the protection of refugees and internally displaced people. In Honduras, draft legislation on the Prevention and Protection of Internally Displaced People was officially presented before Congress in October, thanks to the advocacy of the youth network Jóvenes Contra la Violencia. **Mexico** unanimously approved a reform to the Refugees and Migration Law, which brings the measure into harmony with the General Law on Rights of Children.

UNHCR RESPONSE IN 2020

As part of the emergency response to tropical storms, UNHCR and partners are providing informational sessions on referral pathways, the identification of specific needs, as well as coronavirus- and SGBV-prevention. In response to the spike in humanitarian needs, UNHCR is also distributing essential household items, personal

318,000 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN HONDURAS AND EL SALVADOR

protective equipment and hygiene kits in shelters in affected municipalities. UNHCR assist refugees and asylum-seekers affected by the storm with food and water, while at the same time monitoring the situation in host communities.



A man walks a flooded street as Hurricane Eta approaches, in Feb. Honduras 3 November, 2020. © REUTERS/Jorge Cabrera

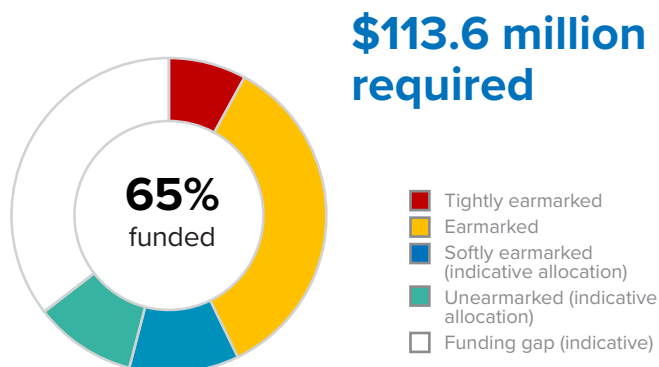
As part of its efforts to help the population of concern meet such basic needs as food and household necessities, UNHCR has upgraded its cash-based assistance and voucher programmes. In **Mexico**, the cash transfer programme has benefited some 16,900 people, and counting. In **Guatemala**, a new cash program launched in May has already benefitted around 340 families. Similar mechanisms are offering multipurpose support to families in **Panama and Belize**.

UNHCR in **El Salvador** works alongside Cáritas in a safe house in Chalatenango, near the border with Honduras, that provides protection to people who have been forcibly displaced. Additionally, a vocational training program for 80 young people was put into place in San Pedro Sula, **Honduras**, to give those facing displacement better future job prospects.

Central America is working together to strengthen protection for displaced populations. On 23 September, Spain and El Salvador – which hold the Pro-tempore Presidencies of the MIRPS and its Support Platform, respectively – hosted a High-level Event to discuss forced displacement in Central America; the impact COVID-19 has had across the region; and the search for solutions. With over 100 participants, the event succeeded in boosting the visibility of the crisis, as well as visibility of the MIRPS as an effective tool for collectively facing the challenges of forced displacement. Announcements of concrete contributions to the MIRPS included those made by Spain (which will provide assistance in asylum capacity), Canada (concrete

resettlement support), the EU (development projects), the BID (renewed focus on countries of origin), the U.S. (resources), as well as firm commitments from civil society and academia. Canada announced that it will assume the Support Platform presidency from June 2021.

UNHCR's financial requirements 2020 for NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA Situation (17 November 2020)



area, as well as northern border regions.

In December 2019, UNHCR and the Costa Rican Social Security entity (Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social) signed a 12-month special agreement to provide comprehensive health insurance to 6,000 refugees and asylum seekers, with all slots in the programme filled by May, 2020. This innovative project has played an essential role in helping Costa Rican authorities mitigate the impact of Covid-19. Significant health care needs are anticipated in 2021, and the project is part of UNHCR's strategy for the recovery phase.

COLOMBIA SITUATION



9 MILLION VICTIMS OF ARMED CONFLICT¹



8 MILLION INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPs) since 1985



57,374 PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CONFINEMENT imposed by illegal armed actors² in 2020



19,095 DISPLACED PEOPLE AFFECTED BY 66 GROUP DISPLACEMENTS by October³ 2020



67,720 COLOMBIAN REFUGEES IN ECUADOR by the end of 2019

1- According to <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/> as of 31/10/2020. Consulted 19/11/20
 2- ACNUR, oct 2020, consulted 26/11/20
 3- ACNUR, oct 2020, consulted 26/11/20

Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, Colombian authorities have registered more than 450,000 new displacements. The pandemic has further compounded the security situation in various communities, mostly in border areas and along the Pacific coast. UNHCR monitoring has shown an increase in protection risks in areas including Chocó (Alto, Medio and Bajo Baudó, Bajo and Medio Atrato and San Juan), Valle del Cauca (rural and urban Buenaventura), Cauca, the Pacific coast of Nariño and the cordillera area – Antioquia, Córdoba (San José de Uré) and Norte de Santander (Catatumbo).

As of 27 October, some 22,800 COVID-19 cases and 767 deaths have been reported among Colombia's indigenous population, representing 2.24% of total cases, nationally. Meanwhile, the Afro-Colombian population had seen 40,010 cases of COVID-19 and 1,435 deaths as of 1 November.

In September and October, UNHCR co-lead efforts by the Protection Thematic Working Group from Nariño to respond to a spike in conflicts between illegal armed groups as well as targeted killings in the Pacific zone (Tumaco). Many of the victims of this surge in violence were residents of the Sabaleta Indigenous Reservation.

NICARAGUA SITUATION

81,000 NICARAGUANS SEEKING ASYLUM IN COSTA RICA

108,000 NICARAGUANS HAVE SOUGHT INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION in the wake of the socio-political crisis that started in 2018

Instability persists in **Nicaragua**, causing continued displacement despite COVID-19 restrictions. **Costa Rica** is the main destination, having received more than 81,000 Nicaraguans asylum-seekers, with more expected to arrive if the political and human rights situations deteriorate in the lead up to the November 2021 presidential election. Many of the Nicaraguans asylum-seekers who have taken refuge in Costa Rica have settled in some of the country's poorest neighbourhoods and regions.

Covid-19 has worsened an already difficult situation for Nicaraguan asylum-seekers. According to a [Rapid Needs Assessment](#), 63% of surveyed households reported eating only two meals a day and only 59% reported having a source of income. The lack of steady incomes has increased the risk of evictions, with one-fifth of those surveyed saying they did not know where they would be living the following month. These figures underscore the vulnerability of asylum-seekers in Costa Rica – a country grappling both with historically high unemployment (at 24%) and a fiscal deficit of 9.7% expected by the end of the year.

UNHCR is providing life-saving humanitarian assistance while also supporting government efforts to make the asylum system fairer and more efficient. By the end of October, 3,540 household had received cash support, most of them in and around the San José metropolitan

STORIES OF THE MONTH



Gender-based violence on the rise during lockdowns [EN]

After she went into labour, he dropped her off at the hospital, leaving the teen to give birth alone, far from her mother and sisters back home in Venezuela. Six months later, she became involved with a new partner.



UNHCR warns 2020 risks lowest resettlement levels in recent history [EN]

Thirteen-year-old Syrian refugee Bakr works in a supermarket and delivers food to support his family in Barja, Lebanon. The family are awaiting resettlement to Norway.



Indigenous people from Venezuela transform a shelter in the northern Brazilian state of Roraima through ecological initiatives [ES]

Vegetables, medicinal and ornamental plants gave Janokoida shelter a new color, which welcomes refugees and indigenous migrants from Venezuela in the border city of Pacaraima, in the state of Roraima.



UNHCR joins response to victims of hurricane in Central America and Mexico [EN]

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has deployed teams to assist relief efforts in Central America and southern Mexico, where an estimated three million people have been affected by hurricane and tropical storm Eta, in what is considered to be one of the worst weather-related disasters in the region in the past two decades.

Did you know that...?

For displaced populations, mobile connectivity means not only communication but also access to services, including financial services. Nevertheless, UNHCR recognizes that non-conducive regulatory frameworks are one of the main stumbling blocks to facilitating mobile connectivity. To gain a better understanding of the challenges, UNHCR, in partnership with the GSM Association (GSMA), undertook a study to examine access barriers among refugees and other displaced persons: The 2018 study examined legal and regulatory requirements mandating that individuals ID be authenticated before people are allowed to get a mobile connection, bank account or mobile money wallet. The result, a report entitled Displaced and disconnected, is the first of its kind to systematically examine and address these challenges in 20 priority countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, and Zambia. Access the complete report, as well as the country reports here.



FUNDING THE RESPONSE

UNHCR's overall requirements for its comprehensive response in the Americas currently totals **\$611.8 million, of which 61% is already funded**. Funding shortcomings may jeopardize such critical activities as the provision of lifesaving assistance and emergency shelter; the provision of cash or vouchers to meet essential needs and to support health responses. This could have a direct effect on the ability of those who have fled to exercise their rights – affecting their access to territory, asylum systems and mechanisms aimed at preventing gender-based violence. Additionally, funding shortcomings could hinder refugees' ability to integrate into their host communities and earn a dignified living and also stymie efforts to tackle xenophobia and discrimination throughout the region.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBLE FUNDING FOR UNHCR'S

Flexible financial support allows UNHCR to place funds anywhere within a given situation, in line with the Office's priorities; the countries from which people in need are forced to flee, and those where they find refuge. In order for UNHCR to plan in the most efficient manner, allocating to priorities first, it is crucial that flexible funding be received in a timely manner. UNHCR's humanitarian response in the Americas is made possible by the generous support of major donors who have contributed unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations, as well as donors who have generously contributed directly to UNHCR's Americas operations.

Thanks to all our donors (as of 17 NOV):



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